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AUTHOR Walters, Thomas N.
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ABSTRACT

Using four different types of magazines--"Saga," "True Confessions," "Holiday," and "The Atlantic"--during a 2-week study, high school students may (1) arrive at serviceable criteria for evaluating any magazine by subjecting it to specific questions concerning its content; (2) improve their communication skills through written and oral reports utilizing suggested evaluation methods; and (3) increase their enjoyment and intellectual reward through purposeful magazine reading. Activities for the 10-day unit may include introduction of the unit, oral readings of magazine excerpts, discussions of individual magazines in terms of criteria, the writing of in-class papers and letters to magazine editors, presentations of oral reports, and anonymous student evaluations of the course. (JM)

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Teaching Values in Magazine Reading: An Approach

THOMAS N. WALTERS, *North Carolina State University*

Recently, at the end of a junior class magazine sales project, my home room juniors, through their sales record, had won the opportunity to select a magazine of their choice to be sent regularly to the home room. I was pleased with the home room's spirited performance and even more pleased at the prospect of having some student-selected current writing in the room. Democratically, I left the selection strictly up to the class. Later, I learned that the vote had been in favor of a magazine singularly limited in value for the high school class room. Due to a lack of direction, and the large number of girls in the class, the selection had been a periodical devoted to hair styles of the month. Helpful, perhaps even necessary, it was; but worthy of a place in the class room, it was not.

I could not help but feel this to be a somewhat typical example of the twentieth century American's affluent means and hard work bringing him no real intellectual return. All that work and cooperation had netted the boys nothing and the girls only pictures of a passing, narcissistic interest.

This mistake was mine, and I assumed its responsibility. While the incident did not initiate my concern for the magazine reading habits of my students, it did solidify an intention to try to effect a meaningful change in those habits.

During a previous semester at Duke University, Professor Stephen Dunning had assured me that the area of student magazine reading was a subject needing attention, but he had further warned me that such a unit of study was nearly impossible to organize and execute well. He was right, of course, and while I cannot claim absolute success in carrying out this plan, the

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attempt was predominantly worthwhile and should be of interest to other teachers of English concerned with the magazines published *for* and read *by* their students. Should my approach appear perhaps dogmatic or biased, or should it in some other way fail, the concerned teacher can surely correct the flaws within its flexible frame.

In arrangement, this unit suggests objectives and evaluation methods; then it gives a brief, ten day sentence outline along with an expanded description of three crucial days, and finally it provides three brief bibliographical listings, items of which may be used as cross references in formulating a particular teaching approach to such a study.

The two week unit of study involves the reading and attempted evaluations of four readily available magazines: *Saga, True Confessions, Holiday,* and *The Atlantic.*

The first general objective was to arrive at serviceable criteria for use in evaluating any magazines. The second broad objective was to improve student skills in expression, both written and oral, through having them develop their evaluations in papers and oral reports. The third overall objective was to increase student enjoyment and intellectual reward, through better understanding of purposeful reading of magazines.

From these general objectives, the movement was to such specific objectives as these:

1. Lead the class in discussion, comparison and evaluation of the magazines.
2. Improve students' skills in inspection, comparison and evaluation techniques.
3. Improve students' abilities in self-expression through their participation in discussion and through their giving oral reports.
4. Improve students' abilities in composition through writing assignments.
5. Reinforce and improve students' letter writing skills through assigned writing of a letter to an editor.
6. Lead the class in arriving at criteria with which to evaluate the magazines. Some suggested questions concerning standards, which the class might or might not wish to incorporate, are listed here:

a) Why am I reading? Instruction? Enlightenment? Pleasure? All?
b) What does the purpose of the magazine appear to be?
c) Does it fulfill this purpose?
d) How does it fulfill it?
e) What seems to be the level or appeal made by the publication?
f) What seems to be the publishers' estimate of you as a reader?
g) Do you agree with that estimate?
h) Does the magazine appear attractive? Tasteful?
i) Does its price seem justified?
j) Is the photography and art work good?
k) Is there a good, easily located index?
l) Are there editorials?
m) Are there both fiction and non-fiction articles?
n) Is the content both rich and varied?
o) Does the fiction reveal perception, or is it of a formula type?
p) Does the non-fiction contain reliable and relevant information?
q) Does the magazine initiate new ideas in the reader?
r) Are the advertisements in good taste and aimed at a mature reader?
s) Are there cartoons? Other humor?
t) What type person does the editor expect to laugh at the cartoons?
u) Does there appear to be bias in the articles? Editorials?

Some suggested methods of evaluation of students that were found helpful, were these:

1. Have written a short, in-class, paper of 150 words evaluating *Saga* using two or more of the criteria.
2. Have written a 500 word paper following these instructions:
   Write on just one of the four topics, remembering to document your composition by using the criteria, as they appear on the mimeographed sheet given you the second day of class in this unit. This paper is being assigned you on

the sixth day and will be due on the eighth day. Your papers will be marked and graded and returned to you on the tenth day for review, discussion and correction.

Topic 1. Using the criteria, give a full description of the magazine to which you would most like to subscribe.

Topic 2. Which magazine that we have studied would you send to a foreign student if you wanted him to have an idea of the interests of our English class? Give several criteria as reasons.

Topic 3. Compare any two magazines we have read, making specific use of the criteria as they apply to both magazines.

Topic 4. Pretend you are the editor of one of the studied magazines. Tell in your paper what you would change about your magazine, or what, and why, you would not change a part or parts.

3. Have oral reports given lasting three to five minutes. Students must objectively apply the criteria to a magazine not studied in class, and read outside class.

Of much value to the teacher in improving the approach was the student evaluation of the unit. Students were asked not to sign the mimeographed sheet. They were requested to be candid in answering this question list:

1. Do you think the magazines we studied were the best choices to use in learning to evaluate magazines? Yes or no.
2. If your answer to the above was no, list two or more magazines you think would be better to study: ----------
   ----
3. Do you feel that you increased your skill in expressing yourself through the writing assignments in this unit? Yes or no.
4. Do you feel that you improved your ability of expression in fulfilling your oral report requirement? Yes or no.
5. If one of our written and oral requirements could be dropped which would you suggest: ----------
6. Do you think we could have accomplished the same objectives by using only two magazines? Yes or no.
7. Which two of our four do you enjoy reading most?

8. Do you feel that we should have done more writing in this unit? Yes or no.
9. Do you feel more confident now in selecting magazine fare? Yes or no.
10. Any general comments on how you would improve the unit: _____

To give some idea of time allotment that was found necessary, the following ten brief outlines of daily activities should serve as guides:

Day 1. Introduce magizine unit. Outline proposed objectives. Mention that there will be oral reports, a letter, and two written papers, one short in-class paper and a longer one as homework. Have class discuss and agree upon criteria for evaluation. Introduce *Saga*. Assign home reading of *Saga* in preparation for class discussion and in-class paper tomorrow. (This day is described below in detail)

Day 2. Pass out mimeographed sheets of criteria agreed upon in class yesterday. Discuss *Saga*, utilizing the criteria. Through class discussion, draw expressions of student evaluations from class. In last half of period have students write short paper stating their evaluations of *Saga*. Students are to develop papers by using two or more criteria in their writing. Take up papers. Introduce *Holiday*. Assign home reading.

Day 3. Give advance assignment of short, three to five minute, oral reports to be given on a magazine read outside class. Students will report in alphabetical order, with first half of class reporting on seventh day and remainder on ninth day. Have class read excerpts from *Holiday* aloud in class. Discuss in terms of criteria. After discussion, introduce *True Confessions*. Have students read aloud from magazine in class. Short discussion. Assign home reading of magazine.

Day 4. Return in-class papers written on day two. Finish reading aloud by students of excerpts from *True Confessions*. Discussion in terms of criteria and foregoing evaluations of *Saga* and *Holiday*. In class, have students write letters to the editor of one magazine of their

choice, referring, if they have to, to the letter writing section in grammar text. The letter must be in good form, and should mention a pleasing feature, or take issue with some aspect of the magazine. Take up letters.

Day 5. Return annotated letters. Comment. Students then make necessary corrections and mail the letters. Lead discussion in how magazines may affect us today, how they affect our reading habits, our school work, our social lives, our jobs, our families, etc. Introduce *The Atlantic.* Assign home reading of magazine. Give advance assignment of five hundred word paper to be due on day eight. Hand out mimeograph sheet giving description of assignment.

Day 6. Have students read excerpts aloud from *The Atlantic.* Full discussion bringing in previous evaluations and comparing. Remaining class time spent with students working in class on their five hundred word papers. Teacher will work closely with students during this time, helping with individual problems and answering questions. Also, ask if there are any questions concerning the first half of oral reports due at next meeting. (Detailed description below)

Day 7. Begin oral reports. Make note of suggestions or comments to be made for improvement and encouragement to the students in later conferences. After oral reports, hold discussion. Then announce that each student should copy a short quotation, that he feels to be typical of a studied magazine, in preparation for a game to be played at next meeting. Announce teacher's availability after school for anyone having difficulty with five hundred word paper due tomorrow. Select a student good at public speaking to explain the game to be played.

Day 8. Have pre-informed student introduce identification game to class. Call for volunteers to read their "typical" selections for identification by class. Full discussion of the differences encountered in the four different magazines. Take up five hundred word papers. (Described in detail below)

Day 9. Continue and finish oral reports. Make notes for improvement and encouragement. Discuss, ask and answer questions regarding the criteria as applied to outside magazine reading.

Day 10. Have students fill in unsigned mimeographed sheet evaluating the magazine unit. Return students' five hundred word papers. Review the papers, touching on notable points. Have students note and correct marked errors. Question, answer, and summary. Introduce next unit to begin at next class meeting.

Since there are, I feel, at least three days that are "crucial" to the success of the unit, they are here described in more detail. Here again, of course, the details may be changed somewhat, but the main steps prove important to the overall success of having the students arrive at improved magazine selection.

On the first "crucial" day, drawing attention to previously prepared bulletin board display of magazine covers of the four magazines the class will study, introduce the magazine unit to the class. Outline and explain fully the proposed class objectives, telling students what they may expect to *derive* from the unit. Then outline the unit's requirements, asking the students to make notes, on what they may expect to *contribute* to the unit's work. Mention the three to five minute oral reports which are to be given on day seven and nine, explaining that this will be more fully explained on day three. Point out that the class will write letters to the editor of a magazine of their choice, and that the letters will be checked, suggestions made on them and returned for rewriting and mailing to the magazine. Then mention the composition assignments, the short one in class for the following day, and the longer five hundred word one to be assigned on day five and due on day eight. Ask if there are any questions at that point concerning required work. Answer any questions, making certain that everything is clear.

Returning then to the four magazines, ask the class if they have any ideas on how to objectively and critically read, and evaluate in some way, the four magazines. Try to evoke from the class the idea of setting up some criteria by which to judge magazines. Lead the class by suggesting broad ideas to consider, such as physical appearance of magazine, its content, the quality of its writing, its variety of style and subject matter, etc. As the students get this idea and begin to contribute to the

list, have a student write out ideas on the blackboard. Should the class have difficulty arriving at points of criteria, have a suggested beginning list which should get the class started in making thoughtful additions to the list on the board. This should require the major portion of the class period, because this is a crucial point in the development of this unit. Inform the class of the importance of getting the best possible ideas, and good concrete points from which we will work.

Once the class feels there are adequate criteria on the blackboard, pause in this interaction and introduce class copies of *Saga* magazine. Give a short introductory statement for the magazine. Assign home reading of it, stressing that the students should read keeping in mind that they will be required tomorrow to write a paper in class evaluating the magazine using the criteria. Tell the class that tomorrow they will be given mimeograph copies of the class's criteria list, and that there will be space at the bottom of the sheet for any additional ideas that they might think of overnight.

On day six, the students will have read, as homework, *The Atlantic.* Ask if anyone has a question or comment on the magazine at first. Ask pointed questions concerning how the class feels this magazine bears up under the criteria. Try to create as much student involvement as possible in this discussion. Have read aloud in class excerpts from different articles, sections, and even advertisements in the magazine. Have a student write some of our class evaluations of *The Atlantic* on the board and discuss these thoroughly. There should be varying ideas and it would be well if these discussions became heated enough to generate classwide interest and excitement. Summarize briefly all four of the magazines and our evaluations of them, ending with a summary of our comments on *The Atlantic.*

During the remainder of the class period, have students work in class on their five hundred word compositions, so that they can be helped immediately with any individual problems. This provides a chance to make timely suggestions, give aid, and also preview what the general approach of most of the class is going to be to the requirement. Just before class ends, announce teacher's availability after school for any further help needed. Remind the class of the first half of the oral reports to be given at next class.

On day eight, the last "crucial" day, the students for their previous night's assignment will have each copied down a short

passage he feels to be typical of one of the studied magazines. One of the more capable public speaking students has been requested to introduce the identification game to be played. He outlines the procedure of the game as follows: volunteers will read their selections and call on someone to try and tell which studied magazine the quotation would best fit in. If the correct answer is given then the student answering gets to ask his question. If the first student queried cannot identify the correct magazine, the questioner asks someone else. Mediate this exercise and see that everyone participates in some way. After everyone has read and had is selection identified, hold a quick humorous mock election to see who the class "magazine expert" is. Then wind up with a detailed discussion of all four magazines. Call for the five hundred word compositions to be passed in.

For examples of the approaches of three other teachers to this area of study, see C. A. Brown's "Meeting Reality in the Classroom" in the March, 1960 *English Journal.* It is an account of Mr. Brown's study of his students' magazine reading habits and his subsequently teaching them the art of selectivity. He and his class arrived at these criteria: cover art, index, cost as related to values received, stories and articles by qualified authors, poetry, advertising, illustrations for stories and articles, jokes, cartoons, and special features, in that order.

Another related article appearing in the March, 1962 *English Journal,* F. S. Kiley's "Magazine in the Classroom" is a short survey of the responsibility of a magazine to the public (*Time* is used as main illustration) and how that responsibility is not always lived up to. Mr. Kiley advises the teaching of students in responsible and selective magazine reading. This article should prove especially valuable to the teacher interested in working exclusively, as earlier suggested, with the news magazine format.

Finally, in this by no means exhaustive suggested list, there is a bulletin by V. D. Moseley entitled "Studying the Current Magazines." Available for ten cents from Northern Illinois University Educational Bulletin Service, DeKalk, Illinois, it advocates the study of current magazines for their ability to arouse interest with today's youngsters.

As a final argument for attempting to teach a unit promoting purposeful magazine reading, I should mention that I have lost count of the number of students — and adult non-students —

who have asked me ingenuously, "What magazines are worth my reading?" As always, the best solution to this situation is to produce informed persons who can select wisely for themselves, ultimately not having to depend on the teacher for guidance. I am convinced that such responsible and rewarding selectivity can be taught. In an age of proliferating and oftentimes empty printing, we must find a way to do it.